



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres seek to continue climb toward respectability

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

October 3, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Encouraging as it might appear, Sabres general manager Tim Murray isn't overly impressed by the big jump Buffalo made in the standings last year.

Going from rock bottom to respectability isn't considered a mean feat when taking into account Buffalo still finished 23rd despite a 12-win and 27-point improvement. It's not as if the Sabres could have been much worse after finishing last in each of the previous two seasons.

"We should be getting better," Murray told The Associated Press. "When we stop getting better, then we've done something wrong."

The hard part now is for the Sabres to evolve another step and start resembling contenders to end a five-season playoff drought — the longest in franchise history.

"It doesn't happen overnight," Murray said. "We think we're much improved from last season. But we have to prove that on the ice. We'll see."

After spending his first 18 months gutting Buffalo's high-priced, aging roster to rebuild the team from scratch, Murray is placing his faith in the young lineup that began showing signs of promise last season.

Forward Ryan O'Reilly emerged as an on- and off-ice leader in his first season after being acquired in a trade from Colorado. And the Sabres young crop of draft picks made an immediate impact with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart combining for 47 goals 98 points.

Murray raised expectations by making two significant offseason additions by signing forward Kyle Okposo to a seven-year, \$42 million contract, and acquired defenseman Dmitry Kulikov in a trade with Florida.

"That gives you a boost of energy, excitement with some of the high-quality players that we brought in," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We expect a lot of big things out of our group."

The Sabres' confidence is bolstered by how the team began jelling in the second half last season, its first under coach Dan Bylsma. After opening 19-26-4, Buffalo closed 16-10-7.

Kulikov had no reservations being traded to Buffalo after seeing the team improve last year.

"I feel like all the pieces are in place right now" said Kulikov, who went through a few rebuilding phases during his first seven seasons in Florida. "When you're talking rebuild, I don't think it's about our team. I think our team has already passed that point. And we need to show it and get off to a good start."

A number of things to watch out for as the Sabres prepare to open the season hosting Montreal on Oct. 13:

ROCKIN' ROBIN

Goalie Robin Lehner is ready to establish himself as a bona fide starter now that he's healthy after two injury-shortened seasons. Acquired for a first-round draft pick from Ottawa in June 2015, Lehner's first year in Buffalo was sidetracked 30 minutes into the season opener when he hurt his left ankle.

He went 5-9-5 in 21 games, and his previous season in Ottawa was shortened because of a concussion.

Lehner spent the summer working out and was notably slimmer upon reporting for training camp.

"It doesn't matter how good of a summer I've had, I've got to go out and perform," Lehner said. "I know what I can do. I'm not eager to prove anyone wrong or right."

ENNIS RETURNS

Tyler Ennis is eager to return after missing the final four months of the season sidelined by a concussion. Entering his eighth season in Buffalo, the speedy, diminutive forward is the team's longest serving active player. He's a three-time 20-goal-scorer who is being counted upon to fill a top-six role.

AT AN IMPASSE

Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen remains unsigned . He's a restricted free agent and coming off a season in which he led Buffalo in averaging more than 25 minutes of ice time, and led the team's defensemen with 41 points (nine goals, 32 assists).

In a sign of good faith, Ristolainen reported to training camp last week after representing Finland at the World Cup of Hockey. Though pleased to have Ristolainen on the ice practicing, Murray doubted his presence in Buffalo would speed up contract talks.

KANE WATCH

Forward Evander Kane is coming off a tumultuous offseason. He faces numerous charges for allegedly grabbing three women by the hair and neck in separate instances during an altercation at a downtown Buffalo bar in June. The 25-year-old is also being sued by a 21-year-old woman claiming he seriously injured her during an attack in his hotel room in December.

ROOMIES

Eichel and Reinhart have decided to move in together after establishing an on- and off-ice bond last year.

"We room together on the road as well, so we're pretty familiar with each other," Reinhart said. Eichel spent his rookie season living with forward Matt Moulson and his family.

Sabres Notebook: Jaunt to Michigan part of Hockeyville USA contest

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 3, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres won't be playing in any routine preseason game Tuesday night.

The Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes will be playing in a newly renovated rink in Marquette, Mich., on the state's Upper Peninsula. It was chosen last year as the winning city for the second annual Kraft Hockeyville USA contest, which provides \$150,000 in arena upgrades and an NHL preseason game to the selected town. And the game will be nationally televised at 7 p.m. on NBC Sports Network.

"Doc Emrick is going to be on the mic," coach Dan Bylsma said of NBC's longtime top play-by-play man. "It's a preseason game and we need it to get our game back in us and the timing of our game in some aspects. At the same time, it kind of has an outdoor game type of feel to it. It's a spectacle. It is a performance.

"It's an old-time feel. I've been there a few times. This is a return-to-the-roots-of-hockey type of feel to it. It's not just an exhibition game we're trying to click off the schedule so it is a bit of a performance. I'm going to be jacked up to play it."

Emrick will do the play-by-play with top NBC analysts Pierre McGuire and Jeremy Roenick. The game will be hosted by University at Buffalo graduate Liam McHugh, the network's No. 1 pre/postgame and intermission moderator.

The game will be played in the the 3,100-seat Lakeview Arena, which opened in 1974. It was chosen in an online vote of 10 finalists out of more than 1,000 entries. It received repairs to areas such as the dehumidification system, locker rooms, Zamboni, lights, glass, benches, end netting and sound system.

The Sabres will fly to Michigan Tuesday morning and hold their morning skate there in front of what figures to be a sizable audience. Bylsma said he played in the building in a tournament when he was 11 or 12 and again at 15. It is about seven hours from his hometown of Grand Haven, Mich.

Sabres television analyst and former Detroit Red Wings forward Brad May did autograph signings and an on-ice youth clinic in Marquette on Sunday as part of a fanfest in advance of the game at nearby Northern Michigan University. The Stanley Cup was also brought to the town for pictures with fans.

The Sabres played Montreal in a Canadian version of Hockeyville in 2008 in Roberval, Quebec and met Ottawa in Dundas, Ont., in 2010. The American version debuted last year in Johnstown, Pa., with a game between Tampa Bay and Pittsburgh.

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Bylsma said center Jack Eichel will make his preseason debut Tuesday night after returning from his stint with Team North America at the World Cup. But Buffalo's lineup for the final week of the exhibition season may have taken another hit Monday when winger Kyle Okposo left the KeyBank Center ice after taking a slapshot to the knee during practice.

Bylsma said Okposo, the team's \$42 million free agent signee, is questionable for the team's two-game road trip against Carolina that continues with a rematch against the Canes Wednesday in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

"He's got quite a big bruise," said Bylsma. "Just a slapshot to an area he didn't have any padding."

The coach said Okposo would be getting further medical attention to check the swelling in the knee later Monday afternoon.

The team is already making the trip without defenseman Zach Bogosian (groin) and winger Nicholas Baptiste (back). Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, who left his Buffalo debut Friday in Toronto with a bruised back and tailbone, has not been ruled out of the two games but Bylsma said that's likely the outcome.

The Sabres return home to practice Thursday and then head right back on the road for the preseason finale Friday night in Ottawa.

Unsigned defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen continued to skate with the team and even got some work in on the power play but obviously isn't part of the trip without a deal. Ristolainen and the Sabres have agreed to not have him speak to the media while his contract is still being worked on.

Sabres Notebook: Jaunt to Michigan part of Hockeyville USA contest

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
October 3, 2016

It didn't take much to make Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma smile when the subject of Ryan O'Reilly was brought up after practice Monday.

The team's all-situations minutes cruncher returned for his physical after playing for Team Canada in the World Cup of Hockey and will be in the lineup for exhibition games this week.

How much does his return mean?

"Our team got smarter, it got better, it got harder working," Bylsma said wryly in KeyBank Center. "Coaches got better today too. When Ryan comes back, he's that type of player."

O'Reilly, 25, was a late injury replacement for Dallas' Tyler Seguin and joined Team Canada in time for its final exhibition game.

He quickly assumed a regular role as the fourth line center between San Jose's Joe Thornton and Colorado's Matt Duchene, and as one of the penalty killers. O'Reilly did not have a point in his six games and averaged 11 minutes, 12 seconds of ice time

"It was amazing, a quick turnaround and I get thrown right into the game when I didn't expect to play," he said. "It was a great tournament, some of the fastest hockey I've ever played. And the team we had, some of the guys I'd played before but a lot of guys I hadn't. To see the depth of Canada, the skills these guys play with and every little thing they do is just amazing."

O'Reilly is heading with the Sabres on their two-game preseason road trip and will sit out Tuesday's game in Marquette, Mich., against Carolina (7 p.m., NBCSN).

He's expected to make his exhibition debut Wednesday against the Hurricanes in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., and also suit up for the finale Friday in Ottawa.

Jack Eichel, who has been at practice a few days after playing for Team North America, will make his debut Tuesday.

"You kind of go through camp to this point in time without Jack playing a game, without Ryan playing a game and you're missing a big part of your team," Bylsma said. "Now ... you're adding two big pieces."

"I'm excited to get back with the boys," O'Reilly said. "I've got a little more responsibility and I'm excited with that. There are lessons you take. To get a taste of what it's like to win a championship is a great feeling and something we want to have soon in this room."

O'Reilly said he reveled in centering for the 37-year-old Thornton, one of his favorite players growing up.

"I tried to play like him, a playmaker constantly making the right passes," O'Reilly said. "Getting to play with him was pretty crazy. It was awesome. I was talking to my parents after and I said, 'How crazy is it I'm playing on line centering Joe Thornton?' I took a step back because I never would have thought as a kid I'd be doing that. To win with him too was awesome."

Team Canada won the title with a sweep of Team Europe in the best-of-three final, taking a 2-1 victory in Game Two as Patrice Bergeron tied the score on a power play with 2:53 left and Boston teammate Brad Marchand won it on a short-handed goal with 43.1 seconds to go.

"Guys stayed focused, stuck to the game plan and did the right things," O'Reilly said. "From there we got a couple good bounces and to win it like we did with a beautiful goal from Marchand, that was incredible. The place erupted. To do it in Canada in Toronto made it even more special."

O'Reilly led the Sabres last year in assists (39) and points (60) while finishing third in goals (21).

He led all NHL forwards in average ice time at 21:44 but Bylsma said he'd like to be able to develop other players this year so he can cut back on O'Reilly's ice time.

"I played him too much. I don't like saying that but I played him too much and I'd like to count on him less," Bylsma said. "The strength of our team could come from more areas and count on Ryan to do a little less."

That said, Bylsma admitted the temptation will remain strong to push the envelope on O'Reilly's usage.

"If we don't have anyone to win a draw, I'm putting out Ryan O'Reilly to win the draw and I don't care if he's tired or not. He's going out there to win the draw."

"Consistency is the big thing. I had solid numbers but there were areas where I slumped or didn't perform the way I want to," O'Reilly said. "As a leadership role being more comfortable with everyone, I have to be more vocal, grow that way and be a better leader."

Sabres want to rely on star Ryan O'Reilly less this season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 4, 2016

BUFFALO – Dan Bylsma has a problem. It's a good one, mind you. Most coaches would love to have it.

In Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly, he possesses one of the NHL's most talented and versatile forwards, one he can throw on the ice in every conceivable situation.

A season ago, O'Reilly's first with the Sabres, he skated 21 minutes, 44 seconds a game, most among NHL forwards. He deserved every second, quickly becoming the team's heart and soul and MVP.

That breakout campaign helped O'Reilly, an NHL All-Star, earn a coveted spot on Team Canada's loaded championship squad at the World Cup of Hockey.

Now, O'Reilly's back with the Sabres. He plans to practice for the time this morning and play in the final two exhibition games Wednesday and Friday.

"Our team got smarter, it got better, it got harder working," Bylsma said Monday inside KeyBank Center. "Coaches got better today. When Ryan comes back, he's that type of player."

O'Reilly's role at the World Cup was vastly different than his regular one as the Sabres' No. 1 center. As Canada's fourth-line center, he skated short minutes and wasn't a go-to guy.

"I'm ready to get back with the boys," O'Reilly said. "I carry a little bit more responsibility (in the NHL). I'm excited for that, that kind of pressure, being used in every situation."

But can Bylsma award O'Reilly, 25, that hefty ice time again this season?

He skates hard minutes, killing penalties and constantly taking faceoffs. He took 1,790 draws in 71 games last season, a whopping 25.6 per outing.

Bylsma wants O'Reilly, whose tireless practice habits have already rubbed off on teammates, to give less this season.

"We counted on him for so many things last year," Bylsma said. "I played him too much. I don't like saying that, but I played him too much. ... You can count on him more than anybody in so many different areas of our team. I don't know if I can ask more of him in that regard."

While O'Reilly scored 21 goals and a team-high 60 points, he also endured a 24-game goal drought midseason. Playing so much defense "takes away where he could be offensively," Bylsma said.

"That's a balance, because we're still going to depend on Ryan to take draws and penalty kill because he's good at it," Bylsma said. "But I'd like to see him come down in his minutes so that he's not – I don't want to say tired out – spending all his energy on the defensive side of the puck, has some leftover for the offensive game."

Bylsma believes the Sabres now have enough talent they could rely less on O'Reilly. If he receives fewer minutes, then perhaps his consistency, his biggest focus, will improve.

"There's a ton of situations I look at and areas I kind of slumped or areas I wasn't performing like I wanted to," O'Reilly said. "By no means was I satisfied with last season, personally or with the team. I think we could have done a lot better."

Like his teammates, O'Reilly thinks the playoffs are within grasp.

"Oh gosh, yeah," he replied when asked.

O'Reilly just left the best collection of hockey talent in the world.

After Canada announced its final World Cup roster in late May, O'Reilly was told to be ready in case of an injury. General manager Doug Armstrong called O'Reilly early last month and told him to be by his phone. Sure enough, when Tyler Seguin was diagnosed with a heel fracture, Armstrong offered him a spot.

An excited O'Reilly spent the tournament between Joe Thornton and Matt Duchesne.

Yes, that was really Canada's *fourth line*. He said playing with Thornton, one of his heroes he tried to emulate growing up, was "crazy."

The World Cup was clearly a special experience for O'Reilly.

"It was amazing ... some of the fastest hockey I ever played," he said. "The team we had, a few of the guys I've played with before, but a lot of guys I haven't. The depth of Canada, seeing all these guys, getting to play with them, seeing every little thing they do (was special).

"For us to win, starting off the season that way, I'll start with some confidence coming in.

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The Sabres play against the Carolina Hurricanes tonight in Marquette, Mich. Lakeview Arena, a 3,100-seat rink, won the Kraft Hockeyville competition, earning \$150,000 in arena upgrades and an NHL preseason game.

Bylsma, a Michigan native, said he played in the rink twice growing up.

Center Jack Eichel, who returned from the World Cup last week, will make his preseason debut, Bylsma said.

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Winger Kyle Okposo left practice Monday after taking a shot on the side of the leg near the knee. The newcomer has "got quite a big bruise" and is questionable for the next two games, Bylsma said.

Meanwhile, defensemen Zach Bogosian (groin) and Dmitry Kulikov (tailbone) didn't practice Monday. Bogosian is working out off the ice and won't go on the trip, Bylsma said. Kulikov likely won't go, either.

Winger Nick Baptiste is also nursing a back injury, Bylsma said.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly back from World Cup of Hockey

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 3, 2016

BUFFALO – After Team Canada announced its final World Cup of Hockey roster, Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly was told to be ready in case of an injury.

Fresh off an NHL All-Star season and a gold medal at the World Championship, O'Reilly, 25, had impressed enough to earn a coveted spot on the stacked Canadian squad's short list for the tournament.

In early September, after O'Reilly had started skating informally with some Sabres, Canada general manager Doug Armstrong called and told him to be by his phone. Sure enough, when Tyler Seguin was diagnosed with a heel fracture, O'Reilly's phone rang again.

"From then, I was kind of getting geared up, looking forward to it," said O'Reilly, who's back with the Sabres after winning the tournament.

An excited O'Reilly quickly joined the Canadians as a fourth-line center between Joe Thornton and Matt Duchesne.

Yes, that was really Canada's *fourth line*.

The tournament was clearly a special experience for O'Reilly, who's expected to be the Sabres' No. 1 center this season.

"It was amazing," he said. "It was a quick little turnaround. I got thrown right into game I didn't expect to play. ... It was a great tournament, some of the fastest hockey I ever played. The team we had, a few of the guys I've played with before, but a lot of guys I haven't. The depth of Canada, seeing all these guys, getting to play with them, seeing every little thing they do (was special).

"For us to win, starting off the season that way, I'll start with some confidence coming in."

O'Reilly, the Sabres' heart and soul, didn't skate today inside KeyBank Center. Coach Dan Bylsma plans to play him Wednesday and Friday in the final two exhibitions.

The Sabres also play Tuesday against Carolina in Marquette, Mich. Center Jack Eichel will make his preseason debut, Bylsma said.

O'Reilly's presence, of course, does a lot of things for the Sabres.

"Our team got smarter, it got better, it got harder working," Bylsma said. "Coaches got better today. When Ryan comes back, he's that type of player."

He's the type of player who's so valuable and versatile Bylsma has to make sure he doesn't play him too much. O'Reilly skated 21 minutes, 44 seconds a game last season, more than any NHL forward.

"We counted on him for so many things last year," Bylsma said. "I played him too much. I don't like saying that, but I played him too much. ... You can count on him more than anybody in so many different areas of our team. I don't know if I can ask more of him in that regard."

Check back later for a full story on O'Reilly.

In other news, winger Kyle Okposo left practice today after taking a shot on the side of the leg near the knee. The newcomer has "got quite a big bruise" and is questionable for the next two days, Bylsma said.

Meanwhile, defensemen Zach Bogosian (groin) and Dmitry Kulikov (tailbone) didn't practice today. Bogosian is working out off the ice and won't go on the trip, Bylsma said. Kulikov likely won't go on the road, either.

Winger Nick Baptiste is also nursing a back injury, Bylsma said.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly back from World Cup of Hockey

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 3, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Ryan O'Reilly didn't skate on Monday, but he finished up his physical and will play Wednesday's Preseason game.

Dan Bylsma said of course O'Reilly wanted to be on the ice, but after seven games with Team Canada, rest was more important. O'Reilly said, "I feel good, I think it's just getting a little rest after the tournament, but I feel good and excited to be back here with the boys."

Now that O'Reilly's back everybody is at least here or on the ice. Bylsma said, "Our team just got smarter, it got better, it got harder working."

"You go through camp to this point in time without Jack playing a game and without Ryan playing a game, you're missing a big part of your team."

O'Reilly doesn't need to get in game shape as he's already there but he said, "It's a little different, I didn't play as much as I normally play, but it'll be nice to get back out and try to find a rhythm."

Bylsma has told me more than once that he wants Rasmus Ristolainen to play less and he also believes the same thing for O'Reilly. Bylsma said, "I'd like there to be less that he gives. We counted on him for so many things this last year."

"The amount I played him, I played him too much. I don't like saying that, but I played him too much and I'd like to count on him less as the strength of our team can come from more areas."

Overall O'Reilly is the only decent draw man they have. Bylsma said, "Just the sheer number of faceoffs that you ask the guy to take in a game is a large amount. If you take 35 faceoffs in a game, that's 35 battle situations and it takes away from where I think he could be offensively and that's a balance because we're still going to go out and depend on Ryan to take draws on the power play and penalty kill."

This is a team starving for offense and O'Reilly had a major slump last year. By cutting down Bylsma said, "I'd like to see him come down in his minutes so that he's not spending all his energy on the defensive side of the puck and has some left over for the offensive side."

On the flip side Bylsma said, "If we don't have anyone that can win a draw, I'm putting out Ryan O'Reilly to win the draw and I don't care if he's tired or not, he's going out there to win the draw."

O'Reilly was in Buffalo doing informal skates when he got the injury call from Team Canada. He said, "It was amazing, it was a quick little turnaround, I got thrown right into games and I didn't really expect to play and then I did and it was amazing. It was some of the fastest hockey I've ever played and for us to win, especially at the start of the season gives me some confidence coming in."

O'Reilly was a leader for the Sabres last season, but he thinks he can be a better one. He said, "I think I'm excited, I want a little bit more responsibility and I'm excited for that, I love that kind of pressure."

"In a leadership role I have to be more vocal and grow that way and be a better leader and it's being more consistent."

"I think consistency is the big thing. I think I had solid numbers, but there are a ton of situations that I look at and areas where I slumped or wasn't performing like I wanted to, by no means was I satisfied with last season both me personally and the team. We could've done a lot better."

Kyle Okposo got a shot in the side of the knee and has a really big bruise. Bylsma said he's going to go have it looked at.

Zach Bogosian is dealing with a groin injury and didn't skate and will not go on the two game road trip.

Bylsma did not have a report on Dmitry Kulikov. Nick Baptiste is still dealing with back issues.

Sabres' Okposo takes puck to knee at practice

By Matt Bove

WKBW

October 3, 2016

Buffalo Sabres forward Kyle Okposo is questionable for the next two Sabres preseason games after he took a puck to the knee during practice Monday.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma tells WGR 550's Paul Hamilton that Okposo was hit where there's no padding and that he needs to see a doctor, but right now it appears to just be a bruise.

The Sabres have three more preseason games and ten days until they open the regular season at home against the Montreal Canadiens. While these last few preseason games could be helpful to the Sabres newest forward – getting healthy for next week should be the biggest priority.

2016 will be Okposo's ninth year in the NHL – he'll be okay without a few preseason games.

Bylsma also said that Sabres forward Jack Eichel will likely make his preseason debut Tuesday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Sabres Top 20 Talents in 2016: No. 11 D Zach Bogosian

By Matt Bove

WKBW

October 3, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres preseason is underway and the regular season is just one week away. Heading into this year it's playoffs or bust for most fans, but is the roster talented enough for the Sabres to end its five year playoff drought?

As the regular season draws near, 7ABC will take a closer look at the training camp roster and put together our list of the "Top 20 Talents."

Here's the criteria on how the rankings will be established:

-Overall skill level

-Past performance

-Age, improving/declining ability

-Potential

On to the countdown:

No. 11 D – Zach Bogosian

Why He's Here

Say what you want about Bogosian's numbers – but he has, and will continue to be, one of the Sabres go to defenseman, in basically every situation. Versatility is a great trait in a player and it's been obvious the Sabres think Bogosian is versatile -- at least so far this preseason. He's gotten time on the penalty kill, power-play and everything in-between.

2016 Outlook

Bogosian has never played a full 82-game season. To be fair, a lot of players have never accomplished that feat, but it's now a week before the season and injury concerns linger with the Sabres defender. According to WGR 550's Paul Hamilton, Bogosian will miss the Sabres three final preseason games due to a pulled groin. The 26-year-old defenseman has had injury issues in the past and his groin is something to keep an eye on. If he's healthy, Bogosian will likely once again log big minutes for the Sabres.

My prediction

I think Bogosian will be ready to go when the season starts and have a similar year to last season. Bogosian is one of those players – some people love him and others think he's a liability. Personally, I think I'm right in the middle. I think Bogosian during the second half of last season showed a lot of promise but at times really struggled. If Bogosian plays in the second or third pair and he's not asked to do too much then Sabres fans will be happy with his game at this time next season.

O'Reilly To Join Sabres On Road Trip, Play Wednesday

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

October 3, 2016

It's been a whirlwind couple of weeks for Ryan O'Reilly. When he woke up on Sept. 13, O'Reilly wasn't sure whether or not he'd be included in the World Cup of Hockey at all. The next day, he was playing for Canada in a pre-tournament game in Pittsburgh. By the end of the month, he'd played in every game for the team that won the whole thing.

Having played seven of the fastest games he's ever played, O'Reilly didn't force himself to practice on Monday. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said that O'Reilly will travel with the team to Marquette, Mich and return to the ice for practice on Tuesday. He'll make his preseason debut on Wednesday against the Carolina Hurricanes in Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

Even without him on the ice, his presence on the Sabres has already been a welcome addition.

"Our team got smarter, it got better, it got harder-working. Our coaches got better today," Bylsma said. "When Ryan comes back, he's that type of player."

O'Reilly said playing at the World Cup pushed him and his Canadian teammates to new limits, both mentally and physically. It forced them not only to play faster, but to think faster too. If he got the puck and didn't know his next move, he was in trouble.

The tournament did leave him with a few things to nail down before the season starts, which is why the two preseason games he does play will be important (he also plans to play in Ottawa on Friday). In terms of ice time, his work load at the World Cup was far less than what he'll likely receive with the Sabres. He also saw little work on the power play in the World Cup.

But he does enter the season not only with the advantage of having played competitive games, but also with a championship mindset. The Canadians were undefeated in the tournament, all the way up to the wild last three minutes of their final game when they scored twice to end regulation and win the Final.

"It was kind of an interesting dynamic, having the best-of-three," O'Reilly said of the final game. "We wouldn't panic. I obviously wasn't playing at that time but still just trying to stay engaged with the game. I think every situation we got into in this tournament, it was an experienced group and the guys didn't panic.

"It's a great feeling and it's something that we want to have soon."

Hear more from O'Reilly and his expectations for this season in Monday's Sabres in :90 below.

Okposo leaves practice early

Even with O'Reilly back in the mix, it might still be some time before the Sabres get to see their forward lines at full strength. Kyle Okposo took a hard shot off his knee in practice on Monday and is questionable for the next two games, Bylsma said. Okposo continued to practice after taking the shot but eventually left the ice early.

Zach Bogosian (groin strain), Dmitry Kulikov (lower-body bruise) and Nicholas Baptiste (lower-back) also remained absent due to injury. Bylsma said that Bogosian will not be joining the team in Marquette while Kulikov's status might be the same.

"I haven't heard that ruling on Kulikov but I assume that's going to be the case," Bylsma said. "He's still dealing with a bruise to his tailbone and it's gotten better and progressing, but [he's] probably not going to be able to come with us considering the schedule."

Hockeyville, USA

The Sabres continue their preseason slate on Tuesday against the Carolina Hurricanes at Lakeview Arena in Marquette, **this year's Kraft Hockeyville USA winner**. Count Bylsma among those who are excited for the experience.

"It's a preseason game and we need it to get our game back in us and the timing of our game and some aspects of our game but at the same time, it kind of has an outdoor game type of feel to it," Bylsma said. "It's a spectacle, it is a performance, it's kind of an old-time feel. I've played in the Lakeview Arena, I've been there a few times, so it's like this has a return to the roots of hockey type of feel to it ... I'm gonna be jacked up to play it."

Bylsma grew up in Grand Haven, Mich., a 428-mile hike across Michigan from Marquette. The arena should look a bit different than when he played a showcase at age 15, given the \$150,000 in upgrades it received for winning the Kraft Hockeyville grand prize.

The game begins at 7 p.m. and can be seen live on NBCSN. It'll be the first of back-to-back road games for the Sabres and Hurricanes, who play again the following night in Sault Ste. Marie.

Monday's Practice

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
63 Tyler Ennis - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 21 Kyle Okposo
82 Marcus Foligno - 22 Johan Larsson - 12 Brian Gionta
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 27 Derek Grant - 26 Matt Moulson
70 Alexander Nylander - 19 Cal O'Reilly - 52 Hudson Fasching

4 Josh Gorges - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
29 Jake McCabe - 6 Cody Franson
41 Justin Falk - 34 Casey Nelson
45 Brendan Guhle - 38 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson
35 Linus Ullmark